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C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 000855

SIPDIS

NSC FOR CBARTON
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/22/2014

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [VE](#)

SUBJECT: VENEZUELA: ACCIDENTALLY COMBATING TERRORISM

REF: BOGOTA 1531

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR ABELARDO A. ARIAS FOR 1.4 (D)

Summary

1. (C) Venezuelan national police captured FARC official Gentil Albis "El Chiguero" Patino in Bolivar State during a February 18 operation to rescue the kidnapped mother of a Venezuelan major league baseball player. Although the GOV initially did not admit to Chiguero's capture and refused to confirm his identity, it later cooperated with Colombian police and welcomed the GOC to submit an extradition request. Involving a Venezuelan cultural icon's relative plus President Hugo Chavez's recent agreement to help Colombia fight terrorism could help prevent the GOV from freeing Chiguero, but the GOC will have to apply consistent public pressure to keep the GOV on task. End summary.

2. (U) Venezuelan national criminal police captured Gentil Albis "El Chiguero" Patino, a senior member of the FARC's 16th front, in Bolivar State February 18. The police discovered Chiguero--and 600 kilograms of cocaine--during a successful raid to rescue the mother of Venezuelan Detroit Tigers pitcher Ugueth Urbina. Chiguero had been sought by Colombian authorities for terrorism, arms smuggling, drug trafficking, and the 1995 kidnapping and murder of two US missionaries. Interpol also had an arrest warrant against him.

3. (C) The press reported the capture on February 23, noting that Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez had apprised Colombian President Alvaro Uribe of the operation by telephone. (Comment: The GOC had gotten wind of the capture and moved to prevent Chiguero's release by publicizing his presence in Venezuelan custody.) The GOV later refused to confirm that the captured official was indeed Chiguero, but Vice President Jose Vicente Rangel offered his extradition if his identity could be established, according to February 26 press reports. The GOC sent fingerprints, which the Venezuelan police alleged did not match those of the detained. Complicating the matter further were the many names which surfaced purportedly belonging to the captured guerrilla. Opposition figures protested that one of El Chiguero's aliases appeared in the electoral registry.

4. (C) The GOV began to allow working-level Colombian officials into Venezuela to investigate the Chiguero case, according to DEA. On March 15, Venezuelan officials declared that they had confirmed Chiguero's identity, and Interior Minister Jesse Chacon told reporters that the GOV was waiting for the GOC's extradition request. Chacon cautioned, however, that it would be the Venezuelan Supreme Court that decides Chiguero's fate, noting that the FARC member faced Venezuela criminal charges, as well. The GOV announced March 21 that the GOC had presented the extradition documents.

The Guerrillas' Kidnapping M.O.

5. (C) Separately, a federal prosecutor who had been working in Bolivar State before resigning in December 2004 told poloff March 15 that the Coordinadora Anti- Extorcion y Secuestros (CAES), a Bolivar State anti-kidnapping squad, contracted local criminals to kidnap victims. The former prosecutor noted that the FARC itself did not kidnap; rather, such police and other urban criminals sold victims to the FARC, which could evade detection for longer periods of time by holding hostages in the countryside. An ex-ELN guerrilla describing a "non-aggression" pact between the ELN and Venezuelan authorities added that the Venezuelan National Guard allowed the armed group to kidnap ranchers, according to late February press reports.

Comment

16. (C) Regional leaders successfully pressured Chavez to agree to cooperate against terrorism to end the dispute with

Colombia over the capture of FARC leader Rodrigo Granda (REFTEL). Because of the involvement of the big-league hurler's mother, the GOV will have to wager that it cannot free Chiguiro without a major public outcry. Still, the GOC must keep public pressure on the GOV to ensure his extradition. Chavez's sympathy with the FARC probably will continue to lead to GOV foot-dragging on such issues as long as the Venezuelan President can evade public accountability. Brownfield

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